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A number of problems are encountered in "structural interventions" (direct changes introduced into the decisionmaking structure of a school) designed to create a mechanism through which teachers can exercise power over matters, internal to the school, that require decision and to provide a means through which the teachers of a school can potentially influence educational policy decisions in the community at large. The decisionmaking model we have been using emphasizes the leadership role of the principal in creating a representative body of teachers who meet, discuss problems, and make decisions on nearly all matters of school operation over which he previously had control. Central among the problems encountered are (1) the hierarchical, bureaucratic organization of schools and school systems, (2) the fact that changing school structure does not necessarily improve decisionmaking, (3) the nature of the trust relationship between teachers and principals, (4) the teachers' lack of collaborative problemsolving skills, particularly in working with peers, (5) the time required to make a new structure work, (6) the difficulty of insuring that the new decisionmaking body is indeed representative while trying to have it act in the best interests of the total school. Both the principal and his decisionmakers need to be aware of potential organizational fall-out that requires attention to interpersonal and group processes. (JS)

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# Developing Teacher Decision-Making Through Structural Interventions

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The intent of this paper is to discuss problems associated with the development of a teacher decision making mode in a school through a change strategy that focusses on structural interventions in the school. There is no intent to polarize structural interventions from those of process but, in time, to indicate linkages between the two change strategies.

The term "structural intervention" is taken to mean any direct change that is introduced into the decision-making structure of the school whose aim is (1) to create a mechanism through which teachers can exercise power over matters, internal to the school, that require decision and (2) to provide a means through which the teachers of a school can potentially influence educational policy decisions in the community at large.

The basic strategy of inducing change in decision-making procedures by concentrating on structural facets of the school organization differs, then, from that described in the previous paper. In that one, the focus was

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on changes developed in the school through an initial concentration on the adequacy of interpersonal and group processes. The strategy to be discussed here ignores, at first, problems of process and emphasizes the immediate leadership role of the principal in so far as manipulating the school organization is concerned.

The model of structural change leading to teacher decision- making with which we have been working is, on the surface, a simple one. It involves, basically, the creation in a school of a representative body of teachers who meet, discuss problems, and make decisions--much like any other legislative group. It is important to note that this is not a consultative group whose goal is to advise the principal so that he can make decisions. Quite the contrary, it is a group in which has been vested the power to run the school and to make decisions on nearly all matters of its operation over which the principal previously had control. These matters would include the range from dealing with hall duty and space allocation to problems of curriculum, instructinn, and employment of teachers. The termination or transfer of teachers might be excluded from its purvey, but not necessarily so.

There is a long historical and cultural tradition in this country that would lead one to suppose that this kind of decision-making structure could be transferred from the political

arena to the school organization without too much trouble. The institution of education itself, different than business and industry, has long preached the democratic way of life. However, as we shall shortly see, our historical-cultural tradition and our preachings seem to be not necessarily related to our everyday work life. That is, a number of problems attach to inducing a structural change into a school, the aim of which is to enable teachers to govern themselves. Central among these problems are the following:

1. School systems and schools tend to be organized much like any other hierarchial bureaucracy. One member of this symposium has likened the system to the "divine right of kings." The current militancy of teachers groups may induce some changes into the system (indeed, it already has). But one suspects that administrative prerogatives that are now being challenged by teacher associations will outlast the challengers.

The relevance of this point for our concern here is twofold. First, the model being suggested involves the giving up of power on the part of the principal. In effect he must say, "This is your school. Run it." An administrative stance such as this involves a good bit of risk and a great deal of trust in the teachers. Further, it runs against the notion that administrators

administrate and teachers teach. In behavioral science terms, the development of a participative decision-making mode in a school almost certainly will produce a good bit of role ambiguity and conflict on the part of both principal and teachers.

The notion of giving up of power by the principal also has some psychological implications. For reasons that are not altogether clear, the field of education seems to draw into it people whose control needs tend to be somewaht higher than those of other occupational groups. Thus, not only does relinquishing of power by the principal run contrary to accepted organizational practices but, in many cases it may be incompatible with a principal's need structure.

Second, as far as teachers are concerned, the idea of power distribution tends to run contrary to the expectations of many of how a school ought to be run. In our experiences with teacher decision-making structures, there have been a number of illustrations of the attitude that "He was trained to run the school--not we." This is, perhaps, a reflection of the large number of women in teaching. We tend to discount this particular interpretation, however, and suggest instead that because teachers have not been trained to expect to exercise administrative responsibility--in either their pre-service or in-service experience--the prospect of its assumption pre-

sents a not easily overcome hurdle. The implication of this point is that, even given a principal who is willing to give up his power, it is quite likely that many teachers will be reluctant to take it.

2. By utilizing the strategy of intervening on a structural level in order to create a teacher decision-making mode, the risk is incurred that reinforcement will be given to the all too prevalent, but rarely verbalized, notion that all that needs to be done to improve the schools is to change the structure. The introduction of new programs, decentralization, and a myriad of other changes that have been inserted into education are illustrations of this point. There have been some successes, many failures, but with the net effect being questionable. The point is that changing the structure does not necessarily lead to improving the product. Other variables intervene.

3. Perhaps the most critical of these intervening variables is the nature of the trust relationship that exists between the teachers and the principal. This is a very complicated issue. Its roots are probably found in long-standing distrustful attitudes about authority figures that most of us have developed. People tend to be able to live more or less comfortably with these attitudes--in effect, they don't surface--as long as the authority figure behaves in a manner that is

expected. In the case of the school principal, this behavior would probably involve benevolence, relatively unilateral decision-making, and closedness as far as questions of emotionality are concerned.

The effective development of a participative decision-making model in a school places different behavioral demands on the principal than those just noted. Benevolence is no longer a virtue. Rather, the behavior required is that of empathic understanding. Unilateral decision-making is not the order of the day, and openness about one's emotionality is needed in order to open up channels of communications.

When teachers are confronted with perceptions of a principal's behavior, such as these, that are at variance with what they have come to expect it is quite understandable that they should be distrustful. The great bulk of their experience has taught them that not only don't authority figures behave this way but that, in all likelihood, they shouldn't. Our interpretation of teacher behavior under these conditions is, then, that in order to protect themselves from the risks implicit in potential engagement on different terms they characterize his behavior a phony or "playing a game."

4. A fourth problem associated with structuring a participative decision-making device into a school is what my colleagues and I see as a lack of collaborative problem-solving

skills on the part of teachers--at least so far as working with their peers is concerned. It is fair to say that teachers have been trained to assume a control position and direct the activities of children. But they have not been trained, nor does the system typically require that they work collaboratively with their peers.

Problem solving skills, in themselves, are not difficult to learn. All of us are familiar with such things as problem-definition, data collection, examining alternatives and so forth. At issue, however, are the operational and behavioral implications of the concept of collaboration in a school organization. These are, minimally, the willingness to engage on a level of mutual influence, the shedding of vested interests, and an overriding organizational goal orientation. In other words, though specific behavioral skills are very important, the attitudinal dimensions of these skills are critical.

5. A fifth and very pressing problem that develops as schools structure in participative decision-making is the matter of time. A great deal of time is required in order to make the structure work. In the one situation with which we are most familiar, elected teacher representatives have been meeting, as a group, almost weekly for two to three hours at a time for over a year. Obviously, this time cannot be taken out of the school day, given present practice.

Therefore, it is an afterschool operation. Not all teachers are willing or able to devote this much time after school hours to the school as an organization. That is, the problem of time has both attitudinal and practically realistic components. This is especially true when it is realized that decisions reached by the group frequently involve teachers outside the decision-making structure and an additional commitment of time by one of the decision-makers.

6. A final problem to be considered here is that of insuring that the representative decision-making body is indeed representative while, at the same time, trying to have it act in the best interests of the total school. If this situation sounds like the problems faced by any representative legislative body, then the intent of my communication has been accurately received. Our experience indicates that this is precisely the phenomenon with which teachers grapple. No solution is at hand except, perhaps to acknowledge the existence of the conflict openly.

The Initiation of a Teacher-Decision Making Structure into a School

In our opinion, based on experience, the introduction of a structure for teacher decision-making in a school calls for very direct action on the part of the principal. This may appear to be in contradiction with the idea of sharing the decision-making process, but we think not. The point is this.

The principal is the manager of the school organization. Part of his managerial prerogative involves developing the kind of decision-making structure that he believes will yield the most productive organizational results. From this point of view, then, the options are his--as will be the ultimate responsibility in any legalistic sort of way.

Once the new decision-making structure has been created and has started to function, a number of consequences can be predicted that are not necessarily related to the decision-making itself. For example, when power is shared with others it is exceedingly difficult to retrieve on a unilateral basis. Thus, while the principal makes the decision, initially, to share his power, for him to reverse his stance would be very risky and probably result in a good bit of organizational trauma and a drastically lowered trust level.

Another obvious consequence is related to the sheer amount of time that will be consumed in making decisions. Problems that the principal might have solved on his own in a short time may take hours in the group situation. This is frustrating, and the principal will have to be prepared to deal with his own frustration and those of the teachers. In a curious way, the willingness of the principal to tolerate the time may reinforce the perceptions of the teachers that he really is "playing a game" and is only waiting for them to fail. That is, in the

process of demonstrating his trust in them by tolerating the slowness of their work together he may, in fact, lower the trust of some.

It needs to be noted, in addition, that not all teachers are tempermentally equipped to work in a school where decisions are made by their peers. The situation appears to run contrary to their attitudinal and value system. We are aware of several not so subtle subversion attempts that occured because of this.

Finally, changing the formal structure also has systemic implications for the informal structure. For example, the decision-making group quickly becomes somewhat of an "inner circle". Its members automatically have more ready access to the principal than do other members of the faculty. This suggests, unless this development is foreseen and plans made to deal with it, that a potentially large group of teachers may drift more and more into the periphery of the organization. Concomitant with this movement the likelihood exists that the principal will be charged with "playing favorites."

In other words, granting the success of the new structure, it is not an unmixed blessing. The issue of importance seems to be the need for both the principal and his decision-makers to be aware of the potential organizational fall-out so that steps can be taken (1) to insure a free flow of data about this

fall-out, (2) to diagnose the nature of the problems that appear, and (3) to initiate appropriate action to resolve the problem situation.

The Nature of the Decision-Makers Work

It is obvious that teachers cannot assume every prerogative or function of the principal. Somethings are out-of-bounds. But our observations of one situation with which we are most familiar indicate that teachers, with a great sense of responsibility, will attack a myriad of school related problems. These run from such things as developing a hall and playground duty schedule to recruitment of teachers to curriculum matters. In this same situation, the teachers took the lead in developing a petition to the board of education to hasten the integration of the school district. A large number of teachers outside of the school signed the petition, though at this time we can only report that it has been received with no particular display of enthusiasm by the board.

Results that May Be Expected when Teachers Make the Decisions

The results that can be reported from our own experiences with innovating a teacher decision-making model in a school do not meet the scientific criterion of hard data. This is so, first of all, because the experience was a limited one. Secondly, in programs of organizational research and development, it is necessary to confront the very real limitations posed by the practical

impossibility of matching schools, obtaining control groups and so forth. Nevertheless, from both interview data and observation of behavior, it seems reasonable to postulate a number of developments that can be expected when such a model is developed.

1. Perhaps most important, from our point of view, is what we observed to be a heightened sense of power on the part of the teachers. A feeling that tends to get expressed indirectly is that the school will develop in a way that <u>they</u> want it to and not necessarily in a manner designated by central authority.

2. Concurrent with the power syndrome is what appears to be a sense of ownership of the school. This is totally to be expected. When a person can control his environment he tends to become proprietary about it. On a school basis, this can be translated into organizational loyalty and concern with school goals.

3. We sensed in our experiences, and we suspect it will be sensed in other situations where the design is replicated, a higher commitment to the school as an organization. This is, perhaps, best indicated by reference to the huge number of man-hours that have been devoted to school-wide problems, after school, in the evenings, and on weekends.

4. There is some indication, as well, that in a school where teachers make the decisions, there will develop some sense of concern for the state of education outside their

own building. The illustration of the integration petition cited previously is a small indicator.

5. Though it has been alluded to previously, another by-product of the process is worthy of explication. It is that the intervention on the structural level to establish a collaborative decision-making process contains the potential of breaking down the isolated teacher in the self-contained classroom that is so familiar to us, particularly in the elementary school. In other words, it may be expected that if the teachers talk and work with each other in one situation they will do the same in others.

This paper was started with a statement that its concern was with an intervention in a school to create a structural device by which teachers could work together to make the decisions affecting the school. This change strategy is different than one that focusses initially on matters of process. Obviously, there are link-ups between the two. The process strategy tends to end up in a structural innovation. The structural strategy creates organizational fall-out that requires attention being paid to interpersonal and group processes.

The central question is not of an either/or variety. Rather, the question is, taking as a given the positive value of a participative decision-making model, in which direction is energy to be spent in a particular school? This question

can only be answered in the light of an analysis of the human and material resources that are available in the specific situation.

We would not lay claim to having discovered the school organization nirvana. Our experiences thus far have been positive, but we would certainly feel that they need to be repeated and tested in a variety of school settings.